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CRS Issue Statement on WMD and Missile Proliferation

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The possible proliferation of chemical, biological, and nuclear weapons (known collectively as Weapons of Mass Destruction—WMD) and their delivery systems to additional nations or subnational groups poses significant challenges for U.S. national security policy. The complex challenges presented by the threat of WMD proliferation have diplomatic, technological, and economic aspects. The United States is a signatory to several international agreements, including the Nuclear Nonproliferation Treaty, the Chemical Weapons Convention, and the Biological Weapons Convention, that seek to contain the spread of these weapons to other nations. Washington also pursues policies that seek to slow or prevent the proliferation of weapons or materials *from* specific countries, such as Russia, Pakistan, and China, and to dissuade or prevent the acquisition of these weapons and related technologies *by* specific countries, such as Iran and North Korea, and subnational or terrorist groups.

In its second session, the 111th Congress is expected to continue its oversight of the full range of programs that address WMD proliferation challenges. For example, the United States provides approximately \$1 billion annually in assistance to Russia and other former states of the Soviet Union to help them secure WMD sites and to prevent the export of WMD technical expertise. Under the Proliferation Security Initiative, the United States and more than 90 countries have agreed to strengthen efforts to interdict shipments of WMD or related cargo. The Department of Energy's Global Threat Reduction Initiative (GTRI) works to secure and remove nuclear and radiological materials worldwide. Congress may renew its deliberation over the funding for these efforts, the amounts allocated to specific projects and programs, and whether additional funding should be provided to allow expansion of these programs to other countries of concern. The 111th Congress may also seek to review the degree of international cooperation and whether these efforts are meeting their objectives in a timely manner.

The 111th Congress will also face issues related to the proliferation of nuclear capabilities to Iran. A December 2007 National Intelligence Estimate has concluded that Iran stopped pursuing a nuclear weapons program in 2003, yet Iran continues to develop the technologies needed to enrich uranium. This technology can be used to produce fuel for a nuclear power program, but it also can be used to produce fissile materials for nuclear weapons. Consequently, diplomatic efforts to convince Iran to alter its program are likely to continue, even though, thus far, negotiations involving the United States, Great Britain, France, Germany, and Russia have yielded limited results.

North Korea's nuclear program will also likely remain on the agenda in the 111th Congress. After having partly disabled its plutonium production capability at Yongbyon in 2007-2008, Pyongyang kicked out international inspectors and conducted a second nuclear test in spring 2009. The United States is currently attempting to persuade North Korea to return to the "Six-Party Talks"—with the United States, China, Japan, Russia, and South Korea—where, in February 2007, it agreed to denuclearization in exchange for economic and security benefits. Congress is likely to continue to conduct oversight hearings to monitor progress, measure the implementation of UN Security Council sanctions, and possibly consider funding for denuclearization efforts should the North Korean government change course. In the missile proliferation area, North Korea and Iran are the primary countries of concern for the United States.

Congress may also consider the impact of concluding a civilian nuclear cooperation agreement with India, and seek to improve U.S. efforts to help ensure the security of nuclear facilities, materials and weapons in Pakistan and India, including export control and other nonproliferation measures. Congress may also consider the United States' role in reducing tensions between the two nuclear-armed states to avoid armed conflict or catastrophic accidents.

The 111th Congress may also review U.S. participation in multilateral nonproliferation regimes and treaties such as the Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT), the Chemical Weapons Convention (CWC) and the Biological Weapons Convention (BTWC), and consider what new international agreements or arrangements the United States might pursue. In an era of expected nuclear energy expansion, Congress will likely also examine the proliferation implications of the spread of civilian nuclear technology and materials. Congress may be asked to consider funding for advanced International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) safeguards and multilateral nuclear fuel cycle efforts, as well as approval of civilian nuclear cooperation agreements. Congress may also conduct oversight on how the U.S. government is organized to address these challenges.

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